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ABSTRACT

With changing social and economic realities, certain cultural differences in the management of Hispanic workers must be accepted and accommodated in the American workplace, where the scientific approach to management is the general rule. The scientific view of management is hardly accepted by Latin Americans whose management philosophy is more simple and based on art. Hispanics rely on subjective perception and are more sensitive and respectful than North American workers, requiring more tact in communication from managers at all levels. Organizations need to restructure their settings for the increasing Hispanic population. The restructuring should include provisions for managers to confer with workers in private and provide more information, in Spanish when necessary, about employee benefits and responsibilities, job requirements, safety regulations, and other important work-related matters. Additional English training for employees and Spanish training for managers is also helpful. North American organizations must address the needs of this growing work force and market. (MSE)

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MANAGERIAL CONCERNS AND HISPANIC CULTURE IN THE AMERICAN WORKPLACE

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Managerial Concerns And Hispanic Culture in the American Workplace

Since a large number of Hispanics are participating in the direction of various American Industries, I want to focus this paper on the Hispanics' behavior in relation to their culture and their interpersonal relationships in an American working environment. Some of the critical points are related to the cross-ethnic cultural labor traits, the Hispanic perception of managers and how American managers can accommodate the Hispanic needs in their organizations.

Besides the Mexican Americans who have been involved in the economy of the southwest, some studies have been conducted about the great number of Hispanics and their descendants entering in the labor force of America. The Hispanic population is largely composed of Latin Americans. They have been immigrating here in the last fifty years for various social or political reasons. The 1980 United States Census Bureau data indicates that by 1990,[1] Hispanics could surpass Blacks as the nation's single largest minority. There are four states with concentrated Hispanic population; California, Texas, New York and Florida.

Fifteen states have now an Hispanic population of at least 100,000 people. The Hispanic population is concentrated around many industrialized cities which utilize their manpower. Therefore, as the Hispanic labor becomes increasingly involved in the American economy, managers are and will be dealing with cultural differences and concerns. Industry will rely on Hispanics, as a manpower resource and organizations have to recognize the needs of this minority group in their organizational development.

This study will consider one important aspect which differs in the management philosophies of North Americans and Latin Americans. Management in the United States is partly a science and partly an art. Frederick W. Taylor, Henry Fayol, Locke and other modern views of management[2] have agreed that management embodies basic principles and relationships which can be codified and communicated. The scientific approach popularized by Taylor, as an aid to managerial decision making, has become a basic instrument to the management philosophy of the United States. It is defined as an approach in management "that emphasized the importance of designing jobs and tasks so that they could be performed as efficiently as possible."[3] This philosophical view of management is hardly accepted by Latin Americans. Their philosophy of management is more simple and based upon art. For decision making, the Hispanics rely upon intuition to reach the solutions to problems at work and in real life situations.

A Latin American is a man of passion. Action becomes more

important because he can express his spontaniety and, consequently, his inner feelings. There are certain characteristics in the Hispanic personality that enables him to accept the effectiveness of the Scientific method. The Hispanic is more impulsive and disregards objectivity. This can create an imbalance in the organization. It can hamper any decision making to improve production and interpersonal relationships between managers and Hispanic workers in the working environment of American industries.

How can managers improve their relationships with Hispanics? North American managers should be aware of the cross-cultural attitudes of the Hispanics. A manager working with this group should realize that the skills that lead to managerial success with his countrymen may not be as practical for the Hispanics. Managers have to search and reach the cultural values of the group in order to interact better with them. The use of bilingual questionaires about their personality will help the managers to establish a mutually satisfactory and productive relationship with the workers.

For the American manager will be the challenge of conditioning the Hispanics to adapt themselves to accept the components of the Scientific method. The Hispanic has to learn new personal values, such as being patient, careful, orderly in thinking, and the ability to achieve results and desired goals by objectives. From my managerial point of view, behavior

modification can succeed when managers recognize the cultural differences, and proceed to satisfy the Hispanics' needs in the organization.

There are cultural trends that an organization should consider when it interacts with any Hispanic group. In the Hispanic society, traditional values prevail toward work and life. The Hispanics have molded their behavior to the cultural norms imposed on them for generations. In an Anglo work place, the Hispanic finds those ties disfunctional and counter productive. This transition has been difficult for the Hispanics. Consequently, there has been much friction in the relationships of managers and Hispanic workers. Leadership can be defined as goal-directed interpersonal communication. Because of their roles in the organization, supervisors and subordinates must interact in various situations. Casual relationships are meaningful interactions because they help to define situations. The development of coorientation between managers and subordinates implies that leadership is a two-way communication process. The effective leader must be influenced by his subordinates as well as exert influence. Thus, not only must Hispanics learn to adapt to the demands in the work place; equally, a cultural implant is essential for managers. Managers can learn the attitudes and behaviors toward other people by associating with them outside of the work place. Socialization with the native culture has been noted for its effectiveness in

the leadership style of managers in international management.

This approach can be useful for the establishment of good relationships between American managers and Hispanics because "These attitudes and behaviors toward people are assumed to be central determinants in shaping the processes the managers employ to influence the activities of individuals or groups toward goal achievement in the work place."[4] In an Hispanic country the leadership style is authoritarian and paternalistic. Interacting with an Hispanic group at the social level can be fruitful. A manager will more readily perceive the culture of his co-workers. He will realize that he needs to make an extra effort in interacting with them. Thus, he will become more conscious of the essential needs of the workers in the environment of his organization.

In the Hispanic culture, a manager or supervisor assumes a paternalistic role. The Hispanic respects him dearly, as long as the manager shows appreciation and recognizes his work and his personal needs. These are oriented to provide for the welfare of his family. It is an affectionate quality that prevails in the Hispanic society in the relationships of managers and workers. The Hispanic worker demands to be seen as a person, a whole being, and not simply as a productive unit. Having acquired this concept about authority, "The security and welfare of the worker is taken care in turn for the latter's willingness to take orders, owe allegiance and work hard."[5] Thus, the employers are

responsible for their employees at work and over other aspects of their lives.

This paternalistic approach of management in the Hispanic world can be a disadvantage when an Hispanic participates in a U.S. organizational setting. The Hispanic will experience the coldness and indifference of the American managers toward the workers, not only in their interpersonal relations but also in their appraisal of productivity. Since the Hispanic worker has been accustomed to hear direct praise or complaints from a superior about his job performance, he becomes frustrated, at least in his first encounter with the American working environment. Here, no such warm, friendly work ambiance exists, but rather a superior-subordinate relationship prevails in most American organizations. The managers behavior is different, enforcing dominance by shouting and yelling to the workers.

These typical characteristics of most American managers may well be perceived with resentment and be considered as offensive by Hispanics. It can have an impact on their negative behavior toward the managers and the organization, as well. The Hispanics expect to receive criticism about their work with politeness and be given specific directions regarding their accomplishments. There have been some remarks made about the behavior of an American supervisor working with a group of Mexicans. De Forest, an experimental consultant working with Hispanics, describes the following situation at a company in Santa Fe Springs, California,

where two hundred Mexicans on the second shift were once threatening a wildcat strike.[6] The incident centered about a foreman who was so serious that two of the long-time Mexican employees quit. After some investigation, the problem was not related to the quality of production that the foreman demanded, but rather that he used "foul language and shouted." This type of behavior displayed by the foreman is unacceptable by any Hispanic group. Hatred will arise from the person involved. As in this case, it was conceived as an insult for all the Mexican workers, not only coming from the supervisor but from the organization as a whole. Thus, American personnel with an authority position should learn more tact skills in communication to relate better to an Hispanic group.

Another commentary made by an Hispanic worker about the effectiveness of communication is the following statement:

> I feel our supervisor should work with me if there is a problem. We should work together. Many times he hollers at you over the radio (P.A. system). He could come over and explain things to me personally.[7]

By this commentary, we can conclude that the Hispanic places a value in personal attention and reservation. He likes to face a problem "vis a vis" with a superior. Any remark should be addressed in private, not facing an audience. The reason behind this is the "honor" or the self-esteem of the Hispanic

personality. The supervisor would have been more effective if he had talked to him in his office, and if he had been more sensitive about the Hispanic pride. As a result, the Hispanic worker would have had an incentive to try harder and produce high quality to please that paternal figure. Also, the supervisor would have gained more respect and trust, avoiding future confrontation with the worker.

Another aspect in communication is language. Many Hispanics in the labor force do not know English. It is the most troublesome barrier between U.S. managers and Hispanics. First, it can handicap their ability to be promoted and have better opportunities to be included in decision-making processes at all levels of production. Second, it can restrict the access of Hispanic workers to important information about payroll rules, benefits, safety regulations, working instructions, insurance and other relevant information to the workers. A comment by a Mexican worker calls attention to a drawback of many Hispanic workers in America. He said;

> We need better explanations, in simple terms. Like they should tell us how to use insurance and how to use benefits. We do not know this at all. So it is just like we do not fill out the work tickets or number of hours they work or what they do because they do not know how to read and write English.[8]

Managers in the American organizations would do well to realize

that the business organization structure of most Hispanic countries is different. Workers do not have to worry about formal procedures or paper work. Such responsibility is placed at the top administrative level. For complaints, the Hispanic worker directs himself to the top because grievance procedures are non-existent in the Hispanic organization setting.

However, some American organizations with a large number of Hispanics have recently increased their efforts to develop Language Training Centers. Aetna Life and Casualty Co. in Hartford,[9] established a program where trained employee volunteers teach English as a second language. Also American managers and supervisors are learning some basic communication skills, along with some training of Latin culture and habits. English-speaking Merrill Lynch employees had agreed that "learning Spanish has both practical and personal values."[10]

This is a beginning, a step in the right direction to accommodate the essential needs of the Hispanics. Consequently, interpersonal relationships have improved and have raised morale among the workers. Also there has been a more active participation of Hispanic workers in production. Absenteeism has decreased. Quality has improved at the same time productivity has increased. I believe that the use of bilingual personnel at all levels is essential in a large corporation with Hispanic workers. Rules, safety signs, benefits and other literature related to the employees welfare should be printed in Spanish for

a better understanding of the working environment.

In conclusion, American organizations can not ignore the needs of the Hispanics. With changing social and economic realities, we must accept certain cultural differences that are present in the management of Hispanic workers. Hispanics are more dependent than Americans and have a paternalistic view of leadership of an organization. The Hispanics rely on subjective perception and are more sensitive than American workers. Therefore, Hispanics require more tact in communication from managers at all levels. Organizations have to restructure their settings in relation to the increase of the Hispanic population. One has to be realistic, the Hispanic community exists in the United States. It has its own character. It is a factor in the economic, political, social and cultural life of our nation. Collectively, the Hispanics represent a growing economic force and an important market for many American companies.

Notes

[1] G. Johnson, "Administración en un Medio Ambiente Hispánico," Industry Week, January 1982, p. 30.

[2] Robert Baron, Behavior organizations (Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon Inc., 1983), p. 30.

[3] Baron, p. 22.

[4] D.B. Stephens, "Cultural Variation in Leadership Style: A Methodological Experiment in Comparing Managers in the U.S. and Peruvian Textile Industries." Management International Review, March 1981, p. 47.

[5] Robert Redher, Latin American Management Development and Performance (California: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1968), p. 149.

[6] Mariah De Forest, "Mexican Workers North of the Border," Harvard Business Review, May-June 1981, p. 152.

[7] De Forest, p. 153.

[8] De Forest, p. 152.

[9] Johnson, p. 31.

[10] "'Survival' English Does the Job," Manpower, December 1970, p. 12.

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